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February 23, 2009

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON  
VARIOUS BILLS**

Senator Gaffey, Rep. Fleischmann, Members of the Education Committee, my name is Susan Weisselberg, speaking on behalf of New Haven Superintendent of Schools Dr. Reginald Mayo concerning a number of bills before you today.

In brief, we support Senate Bill No. 945<sup>§</sup>, AAC World Language Requirements, Senate Bill No. 947<sup>§</sup>, AAC High School Credit for Approved Online Coursework, House Bill No. 6487, AAC the Reporting of Truancy Data, House Bill No. 6488<sup>§</sup>, AAC Installation of Photovoltaic Panels on School Buildings, House Bill No. 6492, AA Authorizing Board of Education Contingency Funds, House Bill No. 6495<sup>§</sup>, AAC Participation of Towns in Charter Schools and Interdistrict Magnet Schools.

We oppose House Bill No. 6489, AAC School Arrest Reporting, and House Bill No. 6494, AAC Teen Dating Violence Education.

We have concerns about Senate Bill No. 942, AA Establishing a Date Certain for Student Notification of Attendance at an Interdistrict Magnet School, SB 943, AA Establishing a Uniform State Date for Connecticut Schools, Senate Bill No. 946, AAC Interdistrict Magnet Schools, House Bill No. 6496, AAC Green Cleaning Products in Schools, and House Bill No. 6497, AAC Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care.

**Of the bills we support:**

- **Senate Bill No. 945**, AAC World Language Requirements, reflects what we already require in New Haven for high school graduation. Attached is a supporting letter from our supervisor of world languages.
- **House Bill No. 6495**, AAC Participation of Towns in Charter Schools and Interdistrict Magnet Schools, allows students from within 20 miles to participate in charter schools and interdistrict magnet schools where there are openings. We support this so long as additional funds are budgeted for transportation of the students, to either type of school.

**Of the bills we oppose:**

- **House Bill No. 6489**, AAC School Arrest Reporting, requires an extensive data collection system that is far too

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broad. It will be expensive and burdensome to the school districts at a time when we are struggling with resources and unfunded mandates.

- **House Bill No. 6494**, AAC Teen Dating Violence Education, is another curriculum mandate when so many exist already. We work to address this important issue through our social development curriculum but ask that it not be another mandate without funding.

### Of the bills where we have concerns:

- **Senate Bill No. 942**, AA Establishing a Date Certain for Student Notification of Attendance at an Interdistrict Magnet School, is fine as far as it goes but it needs to leave room for later notification when a student is accepted off a waiting list.
- **Senate Bill No. 943**, AA Establishing a Uniform State Date for Connecticut Schools, sets forth an admirable goal for school years to start after Labor Day. However, when Labor Day runs late, as it does this coming September, school would not start until September 9<sup>th</sup>. This kind of start date can push a school year out quite far in June, especially when a school district has December, February and April vacations. It also reduces the margin of error for snow days.
- In New Haven, we pride ourselves on our energy efficient and green buildings. **House Bill No. 6496**, AAC Green Cleaning Products in Schools, may well be achievable in the time frames specified; our experience with green cleaning products several years ago was less positive but we believe that green products have advanced significantly. We would hope that there is no cost differential by the time the mandate would take effect. We have some questions about the third party certification in Section 1(c) as opposed to a local health department. Also, we would request that posting indoor air quality reviews on each school's individual website, as required in Sec. 2, be revised to the Board of Education's website, as we have over 50 schools and want to make sure current information is readily available, and that the posting requirement be effective July 1, 2010 to give us time to post comprehensively.
- **House Bill No. 6497**, AAC Educational Stability for Children in Foster Care, codifies our existing practice in New Haven pursuant to federal law provisions. Please note that the transportation of children from foster care to school is quite expensive. The data gathering in the bill is helpful but what is critical is for DCF to attempt to place foster children relatively close to their home school. Currently we are providing additional transportation to 10 towns for New Haven students who have been placed outside of the district by DCF. The towns include: Waterbury, Meriden, Windsor, Torrington, Middletown, Stratford, Hebron, Windsor, Woodbridge and South Windsor. Some examples of cost: Windsor to a New Haven school, \$276 daily, Waterbury to a New Haven school, \$245 daily. The current transportation total for the 10 towns is \$2,196 per day. If we were to calculate for the full year at 180 days the cost would be \$395,280 annually. While many of the placements are not for the full year, as some cancel, there are always other placements added. There are

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additional towns where students are being placed through DCF; however, those towns are receiving transportation through our magnet program and in many cases we have the ability to add the student to an existing bus. The 10 towns outlined above are not our magnet school towns.

- Finally, we have some concerns about **Senate Bill No. 946, An Act Concerning Interdistrict Magnet Schools**. Of our 20,000 public school students in New Haven, 1,987 students are from 30 towns in grades pre-K through 12; there are 17 interdistrict magnet schools, 4 intra-district magnets for New Haven students, and 3 lighthouse schools. A total of 7,325 students attend magnet schools in New Haven. We believe our program is the largest and most successful in the state, and our schools generate excitement for their themes from throughout the region. In December, two New Haven high schools were among just 16 high schools across Connecticut that were awarded US News & World Report's Silver designation, and one New Haven high school was among the five awarded a Bronze designation; all three are interdistrict magnet schools. And, John C. Daniels School of International Communication has been awarded the status of 2009 Magnet School of Excellence by Magnet Schools of America, which selects 75 magnet schools in the nation for this top category.

Section 1 of S.B. No. 946 prohibits school construction project applications for new interdistrict magnet schools until the commissioner approves a comprehensive statewide interdistrict magnet plan. At this point in New Haven, our comprehensive facilities plan calls for renovating three existing interdistrict magnet schools, but not building any new ones. The department told us that this ban would apply to existing interdistrict magnet schools in existing buildings slated for renovations. We would ask that "new" be defined as new interdistrict magnet schools slated for new buildings so that, when we do apply, we can appropriately work on existing interdistrict schools. We would assume that the same "new" interdistrict magnet school definition applies to the changes in the statute in Section 2.

Thank you. With me is our magnet school supervisor, and we would be happy to answer any questions.

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February 23, 2009

Dear Members of the Education Committee;

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I write to you today as the Supervisor of World Languages for the New Haven Public Schools and as a strong supporter of a balanced and complete education for the children of Connecticut - an education that demands the inclusion of a world language requirement.

With a growing globalized economy, knowledge of a foreign language is becoming necessary for an increasing number of careers. It is imperative that we provide foreign language education for our students who will live and work in a world where multilingual societies have a competitive advantage over monolingual societies. Knowledge of a second language will enhance job mobility and advancement for our students when they join the workforce.

Research has demonstrated that learning a foreign language develops thinking skills and cognitive processing abilities. Critical thinking, creativity, memory and listening all improve through the study of a foreign language. High school foreign language study enhances academic preparation for college and improves overall student performance in school. A correlation has been demonstrated between the study of a foreign language in high school and higher SAT and ACT scores.

I strongly urge the passage of bill 945. It is our responsibility to ensure that our children receive the foreign language study they need to live and work in today's, and tomorrow's, world.

Sincerely yours,

*Karen de Fur*

Karen de Fur  
Supervisor of World Languages  
New Haven Public Schools